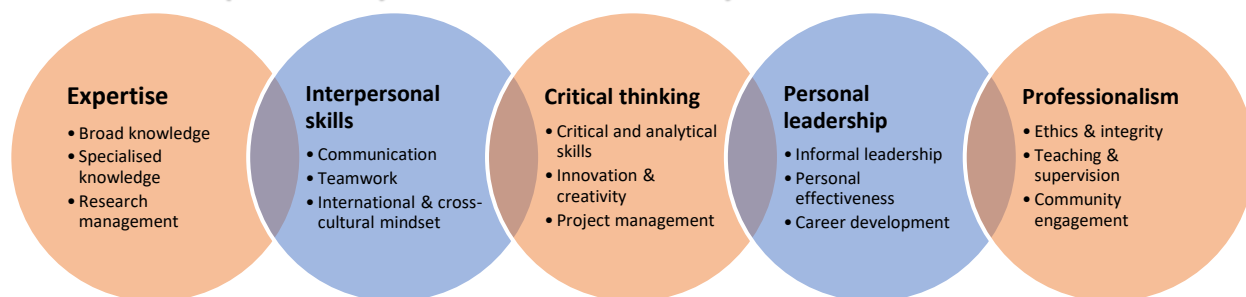


Competency matrix for early career researchers



About this matrix

This competency matrix can help you to identify your competencies and development needs. It is designed to help you to focus your professional development on those areas which you determine will be critical in your further career.

Competencies combine the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that help you excel at things like innovation, analysis, collaboration and communication. By engaging consciously with the process of developing your competencies over the course of your research project, you will be better prepared to underline your key strengths and unique experiences in future job applications.

Ghent University has developed a competency matrix focused around five clusters:

EXPERTISE: the ability to build up and utilise cross-disciplinary and specialised knowledge, methodologies, and skills. In doing so, demonstrate a broad and in-depth understanding of your field.

CRITICAL THINKING: the development of the critical and analytical mindset and skillset needed to perform your research and other professional tasks & assignments in an effective, critical & proactive manner.

PERSONAL LEADERSHIP: taking responsibility for your professional activities and purposefully steering your career. The ability to keep challenging and developing yourself so as to achieve your potential by actively seeking out feedback and engaging in honest self-reflection and evaluation.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS: the ability to communicate and interact effectively with colleagues at all levels, be it peers, students, or stakeholders from other organizations and society at large. Interpersonal skills are the cluster of attitudes that shape our professional relationships and engagement with others.

PROFESSIONALISM: understanding accepted etiquette and expected behaviours in a professional setting and modeling those behaviours both within and outside the organization. The ability to embody the values of your organization and in doing so to enhance the perception of your work and organization.

Using the competency matrix

Determine your personal competency profile

Each competency in the matrix is accompanied by a series of statements that describe how the specific knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours associated with that competency can be put into practice

successfully. As you start and progress your PhD project, you can use this to **determine your personal competency profile**. You can do this by mapping the experience you have built up in relation to each competency against these statements and indicating the extent to which you feel confident in your ability to put them into practice. While you may have an innate ability to excel in some areas, developing specific examples of where you've successfully demonstrated a certain competency will bolster your ability to pitch your skillset in grant applications or job interviews.

Define your professional development priorities

Once you have a sense of your own competency profile, you can start to work out **your professional development priorities**. The process of managing and completing a research project offers a wide range of development opportunities. Being strategic about how you seize those opportunities is precisely what the competency matrix is there to help you achieve. Which areas do you want to strengthen further? Which areas should you develop in which you've not had much experience? What are the key competencies recruiters for your dream job will be looking for? The clearer you can articulate your development priorities, the more your choices around which courses and conferences to attend will map onto your professional ambitions.

Discuss your professional development

Critical feedback is as crucial to your professional development as it is to your research. Your supervisor(s), peers, other colleagues, family and friends who engage with and observe your work can add important perspective to your own judgments and help you to refine your professional development goals. As a starting point, the competency matrix can form the basis for the designated section on this in the yearly self-reflection report and lead into an open conversation with your supervisor(s) or advisory committee **about your professional development**. They can advise you on where to focus your development and help you to identify opportunities you can exploit to gain high level experience in key development areas.

Identifying development opportunities

It can often feel tricky to work out how to develop a competency once you've decided to focus on it. Here are three suggestions to help you think about this:

- **Make the implicit explicit.** As you work to achieve research goals, you should be aware that you are also developing valuable transferable skills such as project management: your research is a project that you manage, often including deadlines, working collaboratively with (international) colleagues, and reporting results across different media to diverse audiences.
- **Find role models and mentors.** Draw inspiration from the diverse career paths of alumni and how they used their PhD as a stepping stone. Pick up tips and tricks from those around you who excel in certain areas, like delivering their conference paper with impact or spinning chats at the coffee machine into collaborative papers.
- **Make the most of what's on offer.** Ghent University offers a range of services to you as a early career researcher, from tailored career advice through the PhD career hub to [the course offer](#) available through your Doctoral School.